

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 12/13/2019 9:00:00 AM

First name: Rick

Last name: Hegdahl

Organization: Vet Voice

Title:

Comments: Alaska Roadless Rulemaking #54511

Good morning,

The below comment was recorded on November 23, 2019 at the REI Flagship Store in Seattle, WA as part of a community meeting regarding the Alaska Roadless Rule. Washington Wild was given permission by the individual to submit this comment to the United States Forest Service on their behalf. Please add their comment into the record.

Thank you.

Rick Hegdahl, Vet Voice

Thank you all for being here today. Thank you, Senator Cantwell especially for coming to speak to the people here. My name is Rick Hegdahl. I am an Iraq war veteran. I retired after 24 years in the Navy. I'm also the Pacific Northwest director for the Vet Voice Foundation. The Vet Voice Foundation mobilizes veterans to become leaders in our nation's democracy through participation in the civic process and the opportunity to continue serving their communities by finding a new mission in domestic and foreign policy campaigns. Those who serve our country, fought to preserve the American freedoms and lifestyles, almost nothing better encapsulates these ideals than the wild spaces and ecologically rich lands that have changed little since our country's founding. The 2001 National Forest Roadless Rule protected nearly 60 million acres of our last remaining old growth forests, intact watersheds and wild rivers. These are quintessential American landscapes.

For many veterans who've returned from deployments marked by desperation and violent conflict, nature and wildlife can be a critical source of strength and healing. That's one reason why Vet Voice Foundation upholds the roadless area protections, whether they be in Alaska Tongass National Forest or right here in Washington state. The ability to connect with our public lands like roadless areas is essential to the American experience and provide important values to veterans. Like so many Americans, veterans count on our national forests, roadless areas for fishing, hiking, camping, and hunting. Some veterans turn to the outdoors to heal from the trauma of war and renew bonds with family members after long deployments. Protecting these lands is one way that American can give back to its heroes who have paid such a high price for our freedoms. Our parents and grandparents made it possible for Americans to enjoy such a strong outdoor heritage. We must continue to protect our roadless forests so we can pass this heritage down to our children and grandchildren. Veterans place a great deal of value in being outdoors and believe that we need to protect national forest roadless areas because they provide families with opportunities to be more active and enjoy the outdoors as an alternative to watching TV, playing video games or spending time online. Thank you very much.

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Hillary Sanders, Member and Engagement Manager

She/Her

WASHINGTON WILD

[Position]